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Mature Fowls
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CARE OF MATURE FOWLS

C. MARSHALL '06
S. T. E. WART '09

THIS BULLETIN has been written briefly and in simple terms for the beginner, and especially for members of the Boys' and Girl's Poultry Clubs. It points out the care which mature fowls should have in order to give best returns for the feed and attention they receive.

Contribution from the Bureau of Animal Industry
JOHN R. MOHLER, Chief
Washington, D. C. Issued August, 1920

CARE OF MATURE FOWLS.

ALFRED R. LEE,
Animal Husbandry Division.

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POULTRY-CLUB MEMBERS should get good returns from their hens, as a small flock of fowls will give excellent results if they receive the proper feed and care, and the waste from the kitchen, table, and garden will help materially in keeping down the feed bill. The henhouse should be thoroughly cleaned, disinfected, and made tight for the winter. See that the house is tight on three sides and that there is no chance for a draft to strike the hens while on their roosts.

Before putting pullets with old hens be sure that the birds hatched in different years are banded or "toe-punched" so that you can tell the age of each one. Move the pullets into their winter quarters before they begin to lay. All of them should be settled for the winter before the weather gets cold. Market any pullets which are very small, poorly developed, or in poor condition.

CARE OF THE POULTRY HOUSE.

Keep the houses in good condition by cleaning the dropping boards at least every other day, and spray or paint the roosts to destroy mites as advised in Farmers' Bulletin 1110 on "Lice, Mites, and Cleanliness." Keep a supply of sand, dry dirt, or coal ashes on hand to use on the dropping boards. Provide 3 or 4 inches of clean litter of straw or leaves on the floor of the house, and scatter the grain in the litter during the winter to make the hens exercise for their feed. One or two inches of clean straw, chaff, or shavings should always be kept in the nests so that the eggs will be kept clean and not be broken. Plenty of sunlight and proper ventilation will help keep the fowls healthy and the house clean and sweet.

Whenever you feed the hens be sure that they are all active and healthy and remove any that are sick or out of condition. Always

have some ventilation to keep the air thoroughly dry in the house, both day and night. Ventilation is controlled by regulating the windows or muslin curtains in the front of the house according to the weather conditions.

FEEDING THE HENS.

Feeding hens is one of the most important factors in producing eggs. Properly balanced palatable feeds are necessary to get good egg production. Corn, wheat, and oats are the principal grains fed to poultry and make what is called the scratch mixture. In addition to the scratch mixture the hens should be fed a mixture of ground grains, mill products, and meat scrap or milk, which constitute a

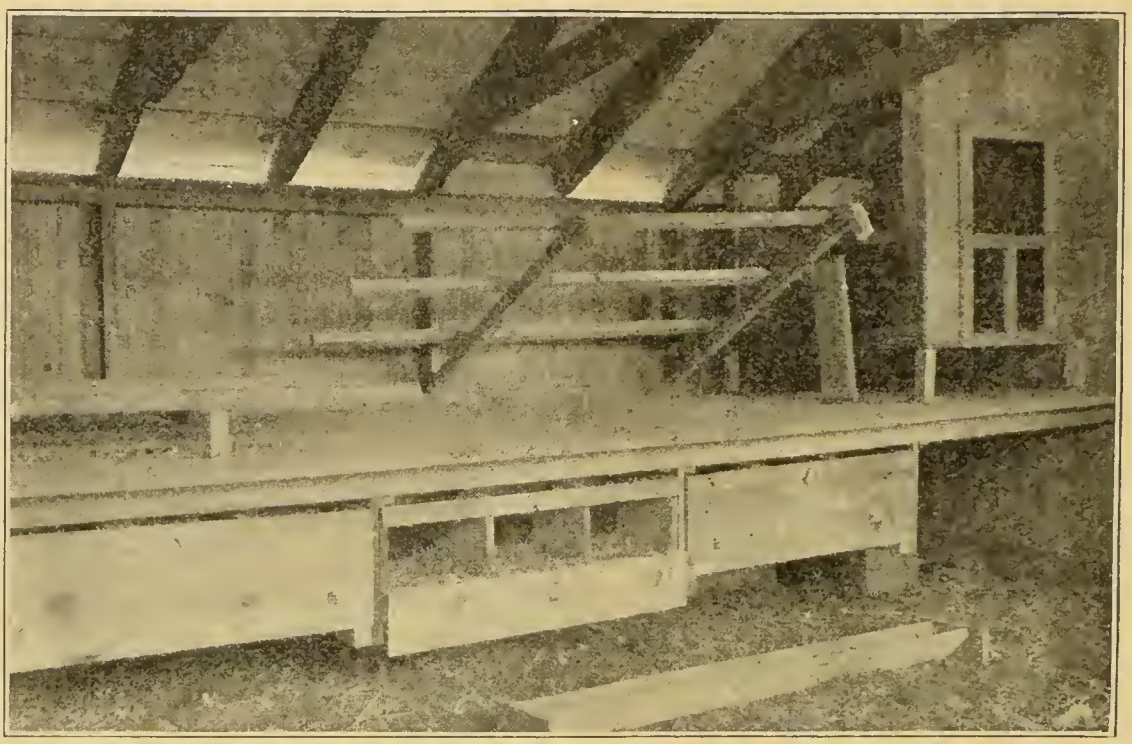

FIG. 1.—Interior of pen showing one roost raised to clean dropping board. Nests contain clean straw and floor is covered with clean litter. The feed trough is used for a moist mash.

mash. Corn meal, wheat bran, wheat middlings, ground oats, and meat scrap form the basis of a good mash. to which other products may be added if available at a low price. Use at least two grains in the scratch mixture, selecting those grown at home or produced locally, and supplement these with corn meal, mill feeds, and meat scrap or waste milk. The club member who keeps only a few hens and does not live on a farm or produce any grains will often find it advantageous to buy the prepared scratch mixtures and mashes.

EGG-LAYING RATIONS.

The following rations have been used with good results on the Government experiment farm at Beltsville, Md.:

Ration No. 1.

Mash.	Scratch mixture.
2 pounds corn meal or barley meal.	2 pounds cracked corn.
1 pound bran.	1 pound oats.
1 pound middlings.	1 pound wheat or barley.
1 pound meat or fish scrap.	

Ration No. 2.

3 pounds corn meal.	2 pounds cracked corn.
1 pound meat scrap.	1 pound oats.

Ration No. 3.

3 pounds corn meal.	2 pounds cracked corn.
1 pound bran.	1 pound wheat.
1 pound middlings.	1 pound oats.
½ pound meat scrap.	

Feed with table scraps or cooked vegetables.

Ration No. 3 is of especial value to club members who have a considerable quantity of waste products from the kitchen, tables,

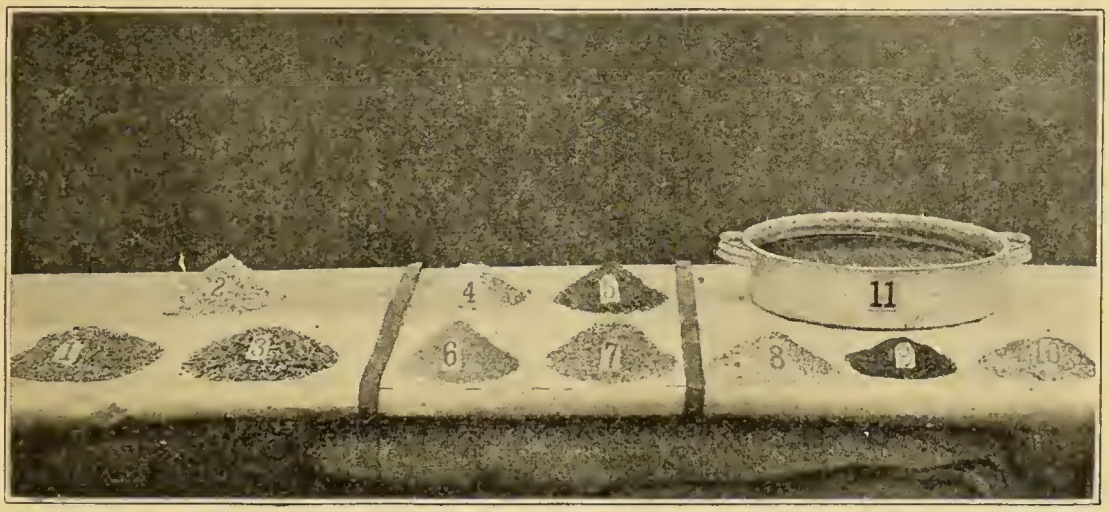

FIG. 2.—Feeds used to make a balanced egg-laying ration: (1) wheat, (2) cracked corn, (3) oats, which make up the scratch feed; (4) corn meal, (5) meat scrap, (6) middlings, (7) bran, which make the mash, (8) grit, (9) charcoal, (10) oyster shell and water. These last four materials should be kept before the hens constantly.

or garden. If skim milk or buttermilk is available this mash can be mixed with milk and the meat scrap omitted.

HOW TO FEED.

The scratch mixture should be fed twice daily, preferably in litter from 3 to 5 inches deep on the floor of the henhouse. Feed about one-third of the mixture in the morning and two-thirds in the afternoon. In the morning give only what the fowls will eat up within half an hour, and at night enough to satisfy them fully.

Feed a mash either as a dry or moist feed in addition to the scratch grains. The dry mash is the more common method. It should be

kept in a hopper before the fowls constantly. A moist (not sloppy) mash gives very good results when used by a careful feeder. It should be fed only once a day, preferably in the morning or at noon, and only as much should be fed as the fowls will clean up in from 15 to 30 minutes. A moist mash is very useful to use up table scraps and cooked vegetables, and is greatly improved if mixed with milk.

The boys and girls must use their own judgment in deciding how much grain to give the hens, as the quantity of feed they will eat varies with different pens and at different seasons of the year. A fair general estimate is to feed about 1 quart of scratch grains and an equal weight of mash (about 1½ quarts) daily to 13 hens of the general-purpose breeds, such as the Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, or Wyandottes, or to 16 hens of the smaller or egg breeds.

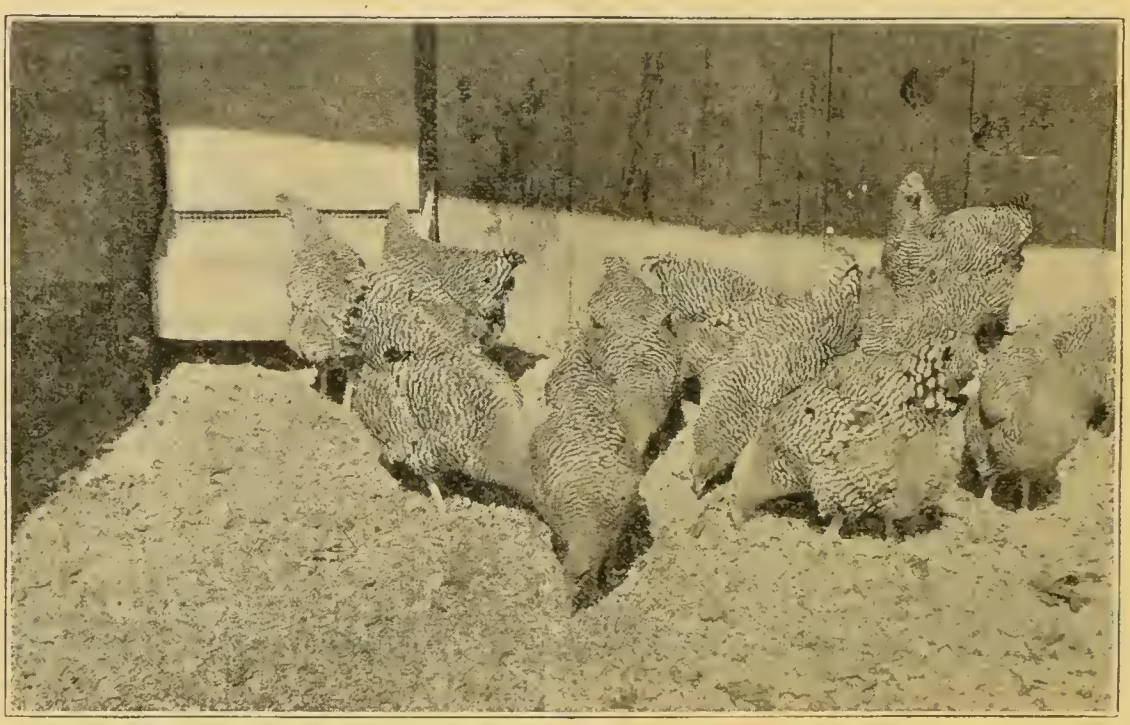

FIG. 3.—Flock of laying hens scratching for their grain. This gives the necessary exercise to keep the hens in good condition. The feed hopper hung up in the left-hand corner of the pen is kept filled with dry mash.

This would be about 7½ pounds each of scratch grains and of mash daily to 100 Leghorns and about 9½ pounds of each to 100 general-purpose fowls. If hens have free range or large yards containing green feed a general-purpose hen will eat about 75 pounds of feed in a year and a Leghorn will eat about 55 pounds, in addition to the green stuff consumed.

GREEN FEEDS, GRIT, AND OYSTER SHELLS.

Green feeds should be supplied to hens confined in small yards and also to all hens during the winter, when no green feed is available in the yards. Free range or large yards kept in grass will furnish ideal conditions for green feed. Where smaller yards have to be used they should be divided into 2 parts and used alternately, plant-

ing the vacant section two or three times yearly with a quick-growing green crop, such as rape, oats, wheat, rye, or barley. This method furnishes green feed and also helps to keep the yards sweet and clean, which is a very important consideration.

Good kinds of green feeds are sprouted oats, alfalfa meal, chopped alfalfa and clover hay, cabbages, and mangel beets. Cabbages may be hung up in the poultry house; the beets are usually split and stuck on a nail on the side wall of the pen about a foot above the floor. Clover and alfalfa may be fed as hay cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ inch lengths, or they may be bought in the form of meal.

Oats for sprouting are soaked overnight in warm water and then spread out from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch thick on trays having perforated bottoms and put into an oat sprouter. Water the oats thoroughly and turn the trays around once daily to promote even sprouting. Artificial heat should be supplied in cool weather by the use of a kerosene lamp or by some other means. Use a good grade of oats, allow a square inch of sprouted-oat surface per hen daily, and feed these sprouted oats on the floor of the poultry house or in the yard. Feed at any time after the sprouts are well started, which usually takes from 5 to 7 days. Keep the sprouter clean and spray it occasionally with disinfectant to prevent the growth of mold.

Keep oyster shells, grit, charcoal, and plenty of clean drinking water before the hens all the time.

PREPARING POULTRY AND EGGS FOR MARKET.

Care should be used to put the dressed poultry and eggs in first-class condition, whether they are used in the home or marketed elsewhere.

The eggs should be gathered daily, kept in a cool, dry place, and marketed at least twice a week. Eggs to be used for hatching should be collected two or three times daily in very cold weather to prevent chilling. When the eggs are not to be used for hatching, it is better to produce infertile eggs, as they keep better than fertile eggs in warm weather. If the club member has eggs enough they should be sorted and packed in dozen cartons, according to their color and size. Any soiled eggs should be cleaned by wiping with a damp cloth.

Cockerels which are not to be saved for breeders should be marketed, either as broilers or roasters, as soon as they are large enough. Hens should be culled and marketed according to their age and condition, as discussed in Farmers' Bulletin 1112 on "Culling for Eggs and Market."

Birds which are to be killed and marketed should be kept without feed for at least 12 hours before killing. The best method of

killing is to suspend the fowl by the legs and through the mouth cut the jugular vein in the back of the throat with a sharp-pointed knife. After crosscutting this vein once or twice cut into the roof of the mouth so as to pierce the brain with the point of the knife, slightly turning the point after it has pierced the brain. Fowls to be used at home may be more easily killed by chopping off their heads. The fowls may be either dry picked or scalded. Dry picking makes a better-appearing market fowl, but scalding, which is easier, is often preferred, if the bird is for home use. Dry picking should be done immediately after the bird is killed, as the feathers will then come out more easily. Be careful not to tear the skin.

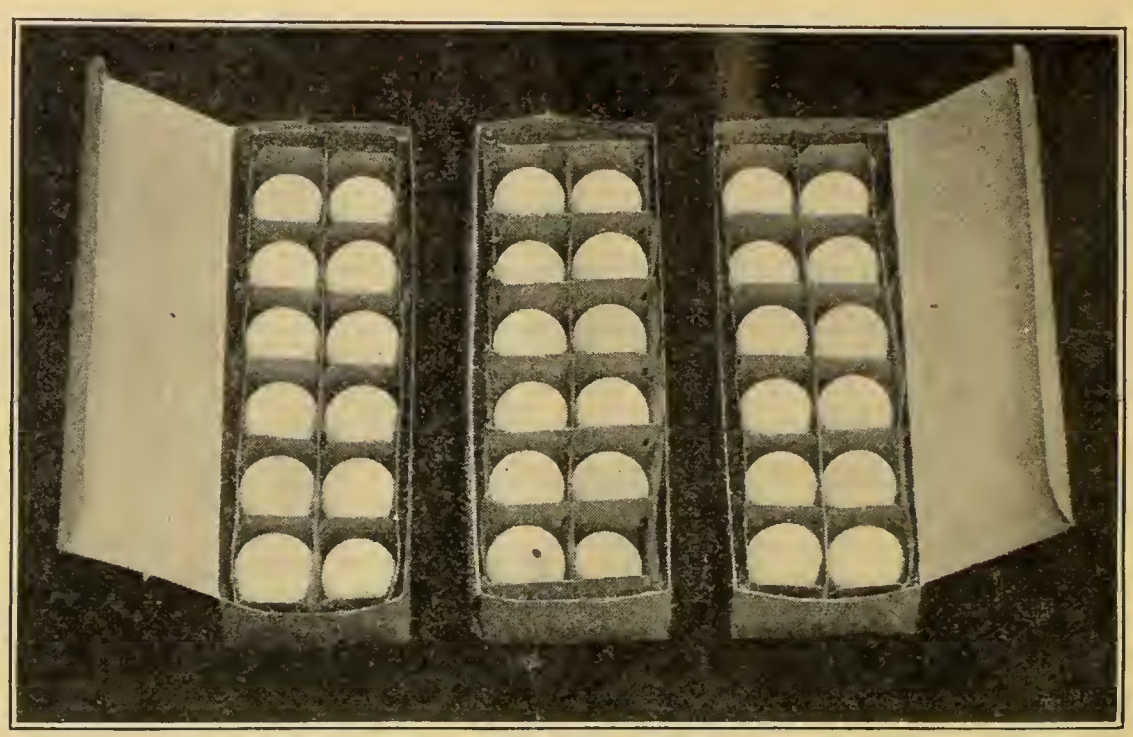

FIG. 4.—Uniform products command the best prices. Standardbred fowls produce uniform products.

For scalding use water which is just below the boiling point, immersing the fowl two or three times in the water, or until the feathers will pull off easily, but do not leave it in so long that the skin will scald.

Cool the fowls after they are picked, either by hanging them up in a cool place or soaking them in cold or ice water. Fowls for market are usually sold undrawn, but for home or local use they may be drawn by removing the crop through an opening made in the skin of the neck, and cutting around the vent and then removing the intestines and all other visceral material, making an additional slit into the abdomen if necessary. Place the liver and gizzard back in the body cavity.

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